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(54) Saturated semiconductor laser amplifier for compensation of optical fiber dispersion.

(57) The span of an optical dispersion-limited fiber (14) for propagating optical pulses is improved by simultaneously chirping and amplifying the stream by means of a saturated semiconductor laser amplifier (13). The chirp causes a compression of the pulses as they propagate through an initial portion of the fiber, whereby the span of the fiber is increased.

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SATURATED SEMICONDUCTOR LASER AMPLIFIER FOR COMPENSATION OF OPTICAL FIBER DISPERSION

Technical Field

This invention relates to fiber-optic communication systems for digital transmission of information and to methods of operating such systems.

Background of the Invention

In fiber-optic communication systems, digital data are transmitted from sending stations to receiving stations by means of optical pulses propagating in optical fibers. Each of the fibers thus carries (propagates) a digital data stream (sequence) of optical pulses typically formed by pulse code modulation, or other kind of pulse modulation, of a continuous optical wave called the "carrier". This carrier typically is a monochromatic continuous-wave optical beam of radiation, as supplied by a laser oscillator source of light having a wavelength in the near infra-red, for example, a wavelength of about 1.5 μm. During each predetermined time interval ("slot") the amplitude of the carrier wave is modulated in accordance with one bit of digital information, so that during each such time slot the carrier wave contains a pulse of standard height or no pulse at all, in order to represent a binary digital "1" or "0", respectively, for example. The thus pulse-modulated optical beam propagates through fiber segments (fiber transmission lines), and each of such fiber segments extends from a sending station to a receiving station. At the receiving station, typically the fiber segment terminates in a signal regenerator device to restore the signal--i.e., to reduce noise and to restore the amplitude of the pulses--to a standard level for further propagation in fiber or for other uses.

As the technology progresses, the desired data rates and hence pulse repetition rates increase in order to increase the data handling capacity of the system without concomitantly increasing the required number of relatively costly fiber transmission lines. As these pulse repetition rates are increased to values of 8 GHz, corresponding to data rates of 8 Gb/s, or more, a major problem arises because of the phenomenon of optical dispersion by the transmission medium, to wit, the fiber material, particularly in case of a carrier wavelength of about 1.5 μm. As a result of this dispersion in fiber material, when a stream of digital optical pulses is introduced into one end (input end) of an optical fiber segment, it emerges from the other end (output end) as a stream of optical output pulses

that are degraded, i.e., are spread out ("smeared") in time and space. As the length of the fiber segment is increased, the effects of dispersion accumulate, whereby the smearing of the pulses becomes more severe. Thus, as the length of a fiber segment is increased beyond a threshold, the output pulses become unrecognizable (unrestorable) as such.

Even if the pulse shape is such that its optical spectrum is Fourier transform limited, and thus minimizes the effects of dispersion and hence maximizes the fiber span, the degradation of signal by dispersion in fiber can still be a major problem.

At the same time the fiber disperses a propagating signal it also absorbs light by scattering or other phenomena whereby signal level is undesirably reduced. Thus, although the dispersion problem could be alleviated by using a carrier having a wavelength that undergoes less dispersion, such as a carrier having a wavelength of about 1.3 μm, the absorption phenomena would then impose an even more serious limitation on fiber span.

In a paper "Use of Chirp Pulses to Improve the Pulse Transmission Characteristics in a Dielectric Optical Waveguide" by T. Suzuki, published in Electronics and Communications in Japan, Vol. 59-C, No. 3, pp. 117-125(1976), it was proposed that a chirped pulse technique be used to modulate the optical frequency of the pulse stream by passing it through a lithium niobate crystal whose refractive index was being frequency-modulated (equivalent to time-dependent phase-modulation) by means of an applied external a.c. electric field of frequency in synchronism with the pulse repetition rate, whereby the optical frequency of the carrier wave varied monotonically across the pulse from its leading (front) edge to its trailing (rear) edge; thus the pulse was "chirped". Consequently, the pulse was compressed by dispersion during its transmission through an initial portion of optical fiber: the chirping of the pulses served to compensate the effects of dispersion, and the total length of fiber segment that was capable of propagating the pulse in a recognizable shape (form) was increased; that is, chirping the pulses increased the span. However, this technique has several shortcomings including a significant lowering of signal level (modulation loss) while propagating through the electro-optic crystal, such as lithium niobate, as well as the requirement of relatively large applied electric fields in the crystal and hence the undesirable consumption of unduly large amounts of energy required to produce a significant chirp and hence a significant increase in the fiber span--i.e., an increase of at

least about 50% (a factor of at least about 1.5). As pulse repetition rates increase, and hence as the frequency of electric fields applied to the electro-optic crystal increase, these shortcomings become increasingly severe, so that this technique is impractical for pulse repetition rates equal to or greater than about 1 GHz. Another technique for chirping and hence compressing optical pulses involves the chirping, by self-phase modulation in fiber itself, of intense optical pulses while propagating through the fiber, as described in U.S. Patent 4,588,957, issued on May 13, 1986 to Balant et al. entitled "Optical Pulse Compression Apparatus and Method". However, for pulse repetition rates of 10 GHz and higher, that requires an energy per pulse of more than 10 picojoule per pulse, which is undesirably high.

Therefore it would be desirable to have a technique for increasing the span of fiber capable of propagating optical pulses having a carrier wavelength in the near infra-red and a pulse repetition rate of about 8 GHz or more that avoids the shortcomings of prior art.

Summary of the Invention

This invention is based upon our discovery that a saturated semiconductor laser amplifier--i.e., a semiconductor laser amplifier operated in a condition of gain saturation--not only can increase the amplitude of an optical beam propagating through the amplifier but also can significantly phase-modulate, and hence frequency-modulate, the optical beam. In particular, we have discovered that a saturated semiconductor laser amplifier can impose a significant chirp upon optical pulses having a pulse repetition rate in the range of 8 to 16 GHz, and having an optical carrier wave of wavelength in the near infra-red, whereby the chirped pulses are significantly compressed after introduction into and propagating through an initial portion of an optical fiber segment, so that degradation of the pulses because of dispersion does not commence until after such initial portion of the fiber segment has been traversed by the propagating pulses. Thus, the chirp in the pulse compensates the dispersion in the fiber so as to compress the pulse as it propagates through the initial portion of the fiber and thereby enhances the span. Obviously, if the length of this initial portion is a significant fraction of the (entire) length of the segment, then and only then will the span be significantly increased.

In a specific embodiment, nearly Fourier-transform-limited optical pulses that have monochromatic carrier wavelengths of about 1.5 μm are chirped by passage through a saturated semiconductor laser amplifier advantageously having the

configuration of a channeled substrate buried heterostructure. In this way, for pulses having a repetition rate of about 16 GHz, the chirping of the pulses by the laser amplifier serves to increase the fiber span from about 15 km (15 kilometers) to about 70 km, i.e., by a factor of more than 4. At the same time, the laser amplifier produces an increase in pulse height (amplitude) and hence also in signal level, which thereby compensates any optical scattering and absorption or other signal loss during propagation through the fiber.

Brief Description of the Drawing

This invention, together with its features, characteristics, and advantages may be better understood from the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the drawings in which:

the FIGURE is a block diagram of a fiber optical digital transmission system in accordance with a specific embodiment of the invention.

Detailed Description

As shown in the FIGURE, a modulated laser device 11 is optically coupled to a saturated semiconductor laser amplifier 13. The modulated laser device 11 generates and delivers an output stream of optical pulses through a fiber segment 12 (or other optical coupler) to the saturated semiconductor laser amplifier 13. The laser device 11 is modulated by an input voltage V_{in} whereby the output stream is a sequence of optical pulses on an optical carrier wave. The output stream as delivered to the fiber segment 12, has a symmetric Fourier spectrum 16 centered at a frequency f_0 , the carrier frequency.

The semiconductor laser amplifier 13 is coupled to and receives the output stream of optical pulses from the fiber segment 12 and simultaneously amplifies and chirps the stream of optical pulses. The laser amplifier 13 is coupled to an optical fiber segment 14 and thus generates and delivers a resulting stream of chirped optical pulses to the optical fiber segment 14 in response to the stream from the fiber segment 12. The fiber segment 14, but not the segment 12, has such a long length that it exhibits significant optical dispersion. Emerging from the laser amplifier 13, owing to the chirping the stream has a Fourier spectrum 17 which is not symmetric and is centered at a frequency f_{01} which is ordinarily lower than f_0 . As this stream propagates through an initial (left-hand) portion of the fiber segment 14 the pulses are compressed; as the stream propagates through an intermediate portion of the fiber segment 14 the

pulses expand to their original width; and as the stream propagates through a final (right-hand) portion of the fiber segment 14 the pulses expand further but not above the limit of recognizability, the fiber segment 14 having a suitable length which is no greater than the threshold length of unrecognizability, as discussed.

The output end (right-hand end) of the fiber 14 is coupled to a photodetector 25, such as a standard avalanche photo-diode or a standard PIN photo-diode. The resulting electrical output signal produced by the photodetector 25 is electrically coupled to a comparator 26 which is arranged to produce a binary digital electrical output signal, e.g. a "high" level to represent the presence of a pulse during a given time slot and a "low" level to represent the absence of such pulse. The output end of the comparator 26 is electrically coupled either to another modulated laser device 31 or to a utilization device 27, or to both. Thus the modulated laser 31 or the utilization device 27, or both, receives the binary digital electrical output from the comparator 26. The modulated laser 31 has its output end optically coupled to an input end of a fiber segment 32, or of any standard optical coupler, for optically coupling the modulated laser 31 to another saturated semiconductor laser amplifier 33. When the modulated laser 31 receives the output signal from the comparator 26, this laser 31 produces an output stream of pulses which is received by the fiber segment 32 and delivered by it without significant modification to the saturated semiconductor laser amplifier 33.

The output end of the saturated laser amplifier 33 is optically coupled to an input end of yet another fiber segment 34. Thus, the stream received by the segment 32 is amplified and chirped by the saturated semiconductor laser amplifier 33, in much the same way as the laser amplifier 13, to produce a stream of chirped pulses that enter into and propagate through the fiber segment 34 in much the same way as described above for the stream of pulses propagating through the fiber segment 14.

The photodetector 25, comparator 20, modulated laser 31, segment 32, and saturated semiconductor laser amplifier 33 together thus form a regenerator 30 which restores the pulses to their original amplitude and shape, i.e., to the same Fourier spectrum as that which they had when they emerged from the laser amplifier 13.

Similarly, another photodetector 35, comparator 36, modulate laser 41, segment 42, and saturated laser 43 together form another regenerator whose output is delivered to yet another fiber segment 44 or to another utilization device 37, or to both. The semiconductor laser amplifiers 13, 33, and 43 advantageously have substantially identical structures,

typically channeled substrate buried heterostructures.

The chirp thus imposed by these laser amplifiers is nearly linear over a central part of each pulse and downshifts the frequency by shifting the phase by a significant fraction of 2π , typically a phase shift of about π . The net gain produced by each of these saturated laser amplifiers can be in the range of about 10 to 15 dB (decibels) or more, taking into account insertion losses.

Typically the modulated lasers 11, 31, and 41 are substantially identical mode locked semiconductor lasers that are internally or externally modulated by electrical signals (V_{in} , for example), each having a structure suitable for supplying at least nearly Fourier transform limited pulses of an optical carrier having a wavelength of about $1.5 \mu m$.

The fiber segments 12, 14, 32, 34, 42, and 44 are typically standard commercial grade silica fibers. The lengths of fiber segments 12, 32, and 42 are advantageously all equal to less than about 10 km, whereas the lengths of fiber segments 14, 34, and 44 are all equal to about 70 km, for the case where the optical carrier wavelength ($=c/f_0$) is about $1.5 \mu m$ and the pulse repetition rate is about 16 GHz, according to actual successful tests. For the case where the pulse repetition rate is about 8 GHz, the lengths of the fiber segments 14, 34, and 44 can be as much as about 220 km, according to extrapolation (fixed product of bit rate and fiber length) from the tests at 16 GHz. The chirping of the pulses by the laser amplifier downshifts the central frequency f_0 to a slightly lower frequency f_{01} , typically a shift of about 40 GHz, equivalent to a wavelength increase of about $0.0003 \mu m$.

Claims

- 40 1. A fiber-optic communication system for digital transmission of information comprising: a first saturated semiconductor laser amplifier (13), for receiving and amplifying a first input stream of optical pulses to produce a first laser amplifier output stream of chirped optical pulses; and a first optical fiber segment (14) having an input end positioned to receive the first laser amplifier output stream of chirped optical pulses from the first laser amplifier, whereby the chirped pulses of the first laser amplifier output stream are compressed during propagation through an initial portion of the first fiber segment and whereby a first fiber output stream of recognizable optical pulses emanates from an output end of the first fiber segment, the initial portion having a length which is a significant fraction of the length of the fiber sent.
- 45 2. A system as claimed in claim 1 further comprising a second saturated semiconductor laser
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amplifier arranged for receiving and amplifying a second input stream of optical pulses derived from the first fiber output stream of optical pulses to produce a second laser amplifier output stream of chirped optical pulses; and a second optical fiber segment having an input end positioned to receive the second laser amplifier output stream of chirped optical pulses from the second laser amplifier, whereby the chirped pulses of the second laser amplifier output stream are compressed during propagation through an initial portion of the second fiber segment, and whereby a second fiber output stream of recognizable pulses emanates from an output end of the second fiber, the initial portion of the second fiber segment having a length which is a significant fraction of the length of the second segment, so that the span of the second fiber sent is significantly enhanced.

3. A system as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the first input stream has a pulse repetition rate of at least 8GHz.

4. A system as claimed in any of the preceding claims wherein the or each said optical fiber segment is of silica.

5. A system as claimed in any of the preceding claims wherein the first stream comprises an optical carrier having a wavelength of about 1.5μm.

6. A method of operating a fiber-optic communication system for digital data transmission comprising the step of operating a first semiconductor laser amplifier in a state of charge carrier saturation while a first input stream of optical pulses passes through and is amplified and chirped by the first laser amplifier and then emerges from the laser amplifier and enters into and propagates through a first optical fiber segment which exhibits significant optical dispersion, whereby a significant pulse compression occurs during propagation of the pulses in an initial portion of the first fiber segment so that a significant enhancement of the span of the first fiber segment is enabled and whereby a first fiber output stream of recognizable optical pulses emanates from an output end of the first fiber segment.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6 comprising the further step of operating a second semiconductor laser, substantially identical to the first, in saturation while a second input stream of optical pulses derived from first fiber output stream passes through and is amplified and chirped by the second laser amplifier, and emerges from the second laser amplifier and enters into and propagates through a second optical fiber segment which exhibits significant optical dispersion, whereby the significant pulse compression occurs during propagation of the pulses through an initial portion of the second fiber segment.

8. A method as claimed in claim 6 or claim 7

wherein the first input stream has a pulse repetition rate of at least 8 GHz.

9. A method as claimed in any of claims 6 to 8 wherein the or each said optical fiber segment is of silica.

10. A method as claimed in any of claims 6 to 9 wherein the first stream comprises an optical carrier having a wavelength of about 1.5μm.

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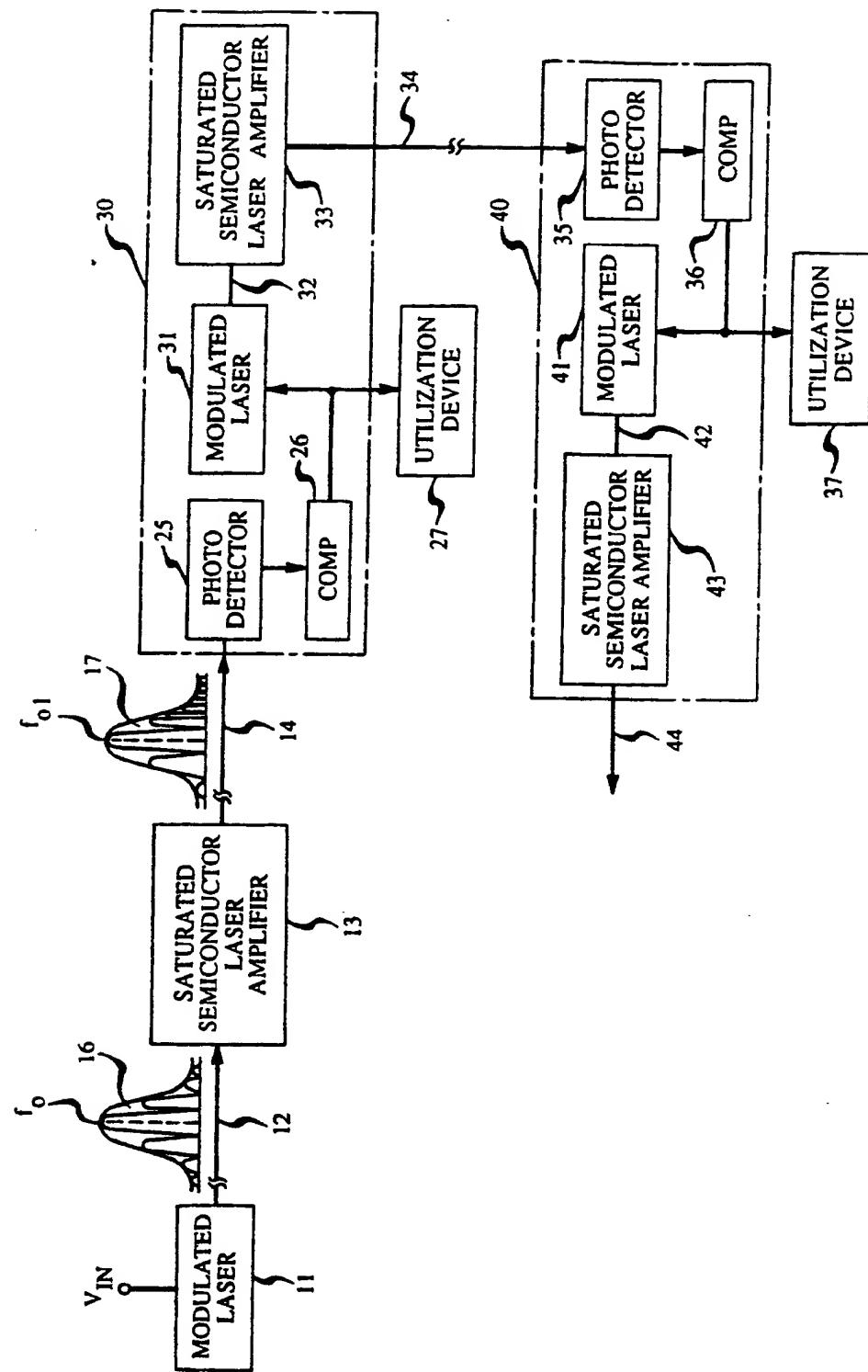
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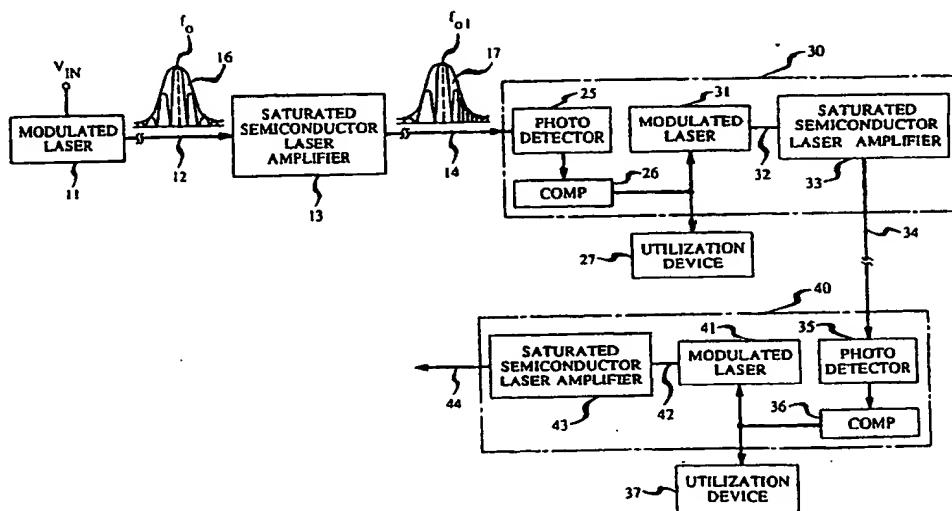
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DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.5)		
A	IEEE JOURNAL OF QUANTUM ELECTRONICS, vol. 24, no. 2, February 1988, pages 398-403, IEEE, New York, US; P. MAINE et al.: "Generation of ultrahigh peak power pulses by chirped pulse amplification" * Figures 1,2,4; page 399, left-hand column, last paragraph - right-hand column, paragraph 2 *	1,2,6,7	H 04 B 10/16 H 01 S 3/00		
A,D	US-A-4 588 957 (BALANT et al.) * Abstract; figure 2 *	1,2,6,7			
A	ELECTRONICS LETTERS, vol. 24, no. 1, 7th January 1988, pages 38-39, Stevenage, Herts, GB; M.G. OBERG et al.: "313 km transmission experiment at 1 Gbit/s using optical amplifiers and a low chirp laser" * Introduction; figure 1 *	1,2,4-7,9, 10			
A	OPTICAL FIBER COMMUNICATION CONFERENCE, 1988 TECHNICAL DIGEST SERIES, vol. 1, Postconference edition, New Orleans, Louisiana, 25th - 28th January 1988, poster paper 141, Optical Society of American, Washington, DC, US; G.S. BURLEY et al.: "Effect of laser chirping on lightwave system performance" * The whole document *	1,5,6			
-----			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.5)		
			H 04 B H 01 S G 02 F		
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims					
Place of search	Date of completion of search	Examiner			
The Hague	10 September 91	GOUDELIS M.			
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS					
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